

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ISTANBUL 0250

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT)

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, TU
SUBJ: ALLEGED HARASSMENT OF GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

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SUMMARY: PROBLEMS REMAIN IN TURKISH RELATIONS WITH GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH, BUT THERE DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE OFFICIAL HARASSMENT CAMPAIGN TO FORCE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE OUT OF ISTANBUL. DESPITE SOME PROGRESS ON TRAVEL ISSUE, THERE ARE STILL THREE METROPOLITANS WHO HAVE NOT BEEN GIVEN PASSPORTS. ALL PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN CITY ARE CONCERNED OVER PROPERTY TAX QUESTION, AND OVER LONG-TERM IT COULD BE ESPECIALLY DIFFICULT FOR GREEK ORTHODOX COMMUNITY, WHICH HAS CONSIDERABLE PROPERTY HOLDINGS FROM PERIOD WHEN IT WAS MUCH LARGE R, TO MEET TAX BURDEN. PATRIARCHATE SPOKESMAN, HOWEVER, EXPRESSES OPTIMISM THAT UNDER NEW ECEVIT GOVERNMENT GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH WILL BE ABLE TO RESOLVE MANY OF OUTSTANDING ISSUES. END SUMMARY.

1. REFLECTING TURKISH SENSITIVITY ON SUBJECT, NEW YORK TIMES REPORT QUOTING ARCHBISHOP IAKOVOS ON OPPRESSION GREEK MINORITY IN
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ISTANBUL WAS PICKED UP BY SEVERAL MAJOR TURKISH PAPERS IN DECEMBER 27 EDITIONS. CONCERNS EXPRESSED BY ARCHBISHOP IN THAT ARTICLE REFLECT CURRENT ISSUES IN TURKS' RELATIONS WITH GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH, BUT WE SEE NO INDICATION OF HARASSMENT CAMPAIGN BY TURKISH AUTHORITIES DESIGNED TO FORCE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE OUT OF COUNTRY. THERE ARE SMALL, EXTREMIST ISLAMIC GROUPS HERE WHICH FAVOR ITS OUSTER; AND EVERY MAY 29, ANNIVERSARY

OF TURKISH CONQUEST OF CONSTANTINOPLE, SOME OF THEIR MEMBERS DEMONSTRATE AT PATRIARCHATE. THESE ISOLATED EXPRESSIONS OF HOSTILITY WILL LIKELY CONTINUE AND THERE ARE ASPECTS OF INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE OF GREEK COMMUNITY THAT PROMISE FURTHER PROBLEMS ON THE TAXATION ISSUE (SEE BELOW). UNDER NEW ECEVIT GOVERNMENT, HOWEVER, THERE ARE HOPEFUL SIGNS THAT SOME OF OUTSTANDING ISSUES COMPLICATING TURKISH RELATIONS WITH GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH MAY BE RESOLVED.

2. CONGEN OFFICER CALLED ON DIRECTOR OF PATRIARCH'S PRIVATE OFFICE, METROPOLITAN BARTHOLOMEW, TO DISCUSS ISSUES RAISED IN REF A. ON TRAVEL QUESTION, BARTHOLOMEW STATED THAT METROPOLITAN MELITON, ONE OF FIVE PRELATES PREVIOUSLY DENIED PASSPORTS (REF B), WAS STILL ABROAD AND NOT EXPECTED TO RETURN UNTIL FEBRUARY. IN ADDITION, DEAN OF THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL, HAD BEEN GIVEN TRAVEL DOCUMENTS TO ATTEND HIS FATHER'S FUNERAL IN GREECE. (DEPARTMENT WILL RECALL THAT HE WAS NOT GIVEN PASSPORT TO ATTEND HIS MOTHER'S FUNERAL THREE MONTHS AGO.) IN THIS CASE, ACTING GOVERNOR OF ISTANBUL PERSONALLY CALLED MINISTER OF INTERIOR AND CLEARED APPLICATION. THERE REMAIN THREE GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLITANS WHO HAVE NOT BEEN GIVEN PERMISSION TO TRAVEL. BARTHOLOMEW, HIMSELF, HAS NOT BEEN GRANTED A PASSPORT SINCE HE BECAME A BISHOP FOUR YEARS AGO.

3. ON BROADER TRAVEL QUESTION, EXCEPT FOR FIVE (NOW THREE) METROPOLITANS, WE HAVE NO EVIDENCE THAT TURKISH AUTHORITIES
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ARE DENYING PASSPORTS TO TURKISH CITIZENS OF GREEK DESCENT. SINCE NOVEMBER, STRINGENT FOREIGN EXCHANGE CONTROLS HAVE SEVERELY LIMITED TRAVEL ABROAD BY ALL TURKS. TO OUR KNOWLEDGE, THESE REGULATIONS HAVE NOT BEEN APPLIED IN A DISCRIMINATORY FASHION AGAINST MEMBERS OF THE GREEK ORTHODOX COMMUNITY. ON CONTRARY, OUR CONSULAR SECTION REPORTS THAT DESPITE FOREIGN EXCHANGE RESTRICTIONS, GREEK-ORIGIN TURKS ARE APPLYING FOR VISAS FOR UNITED STATES AT NORMAL RATE. AS ONE EXAMPLE OF RECENT TRAVEL, METROPOLITAN BARTHOLOMEW MENTIONED THAT HIS OWN PARENTS HAD JUST DEPARTED ISTANBUL FOR AUSTRALIA TO VISIT HIS BROTHER.

4. DESPITE SLOW PROGRESS ON PASSPORT ISSUE, METROPOLITAN BARTHOLOMEW WAS HOPEFUL THAT UNDER ECEVIT GOVERNMENT, PATRIARCHATE WOULD BE ABLE TO RESOLVE MANY OF GREEK COMMUNITY'S PROBLEMS. HE WAS ENCOURAGED BY NEW ADMINISTRATION'S INITIATIVE ON GREEK/TURKISH RELATIONS, AND PARTICULARLY TOOK HEART AT ARTICLE IN ONE PAPER (CUMHURRIYET) WHICH STATED THAT PRIME MINISTER ECEVIT HAD ASKED FOREIGN MINISTRY TO PREPARE REPORTS ON VARIOUS OUTSTANDING ISSUES BETWEEN GREECE AND TURKEY INCLUDING THOSE CONCERNING PATRIARCHATE. METROPOLITAN WAS ALSO UNDOUBTEDLY HAPPY AT NEWS THAT GENERAL MANAGER OF DEPARTMENT OF FOUNDA-

TIONS (VAKIFLAR GENEL MUDURLUGU), WAS RECENTLY FIRED. AS ADMINISTERED UNDER PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT, THIS OFFICE, WHICH OVERSEES ACTIVITIES OF MANY MINORITY INSTITUTIONS, CAUSED CONSIDERABLE CONCERN IN MINORITY COMMUNITIES. DISCHARGED GENERAL MANAGER WAS BROTHER-IN-LAW OF NECMETTIN ERBAKAN, HEAD OF ISLAMIC-ORIENTED NATIONAL SALVATION PARTY.

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5. TAXATION OF PROPERTY OF PRIVATE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IS CURRENTLY WORRISOME PROBLEM FOR ALL SUCH INSTITUTIONS IN TURKEY, INCLUDING THE FRENCH SCHOOLS, THE AMERICAN COMMUNITY SCHOOL AND ROBERT COLLEGE. BECAUSE OF THE SIZE OF ITS HOLDINGS, SUCH TAXATION POSES A PARTICULARLY DIFFICULT PROBLEM FOR TE GREEK ORTHODOX COMMUNITY. FROM PREVIOUS YEARS, WHEN IT WAS MUCH LARGER, COMMUNITY (NOW ONLY ABOUT 10-15,000 PERSONS) HAS INHERITED LARGE OVERHEAD IN INSTITUTIONAL PROPERTY WHICH EXCEEDS ITS APPARENT NEEDS AND PROBABLY ITS FINANCIAL ABILITY TO MAINTAIN. FOR EXAMPLE, THERE ARE THIRTY-FIVE PRIVATE GREEK SCHOOLS IN ISTANBUL, AND WE ARE TOLD GREEK COMMUNITY'S STUDENT POPULATION IS ONLY ABOUT 1,000. TWO OF LARGER SCHOOLS, ZAPION GIRLS SCHOOL (MENTIONED REF A) HAS APPROXIMATELY 350 STUDENTS AND BOY'S LYCEE IN FENER HAS 100. ONLY HANDFUL OF STUDENTS ATTEND MANY OF OTHER FACILITIES. THESE ARE APPARENTLY KEPT OPEN TO MAINTAIN THEIR STATUS AS PRIVATE NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS WHICH ARE ENTITLED TO PREFERENTIAL TAX TREATMENT. ALTHOUGH ALL PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN TURKEY PAY PROPERTY TAX, WE SUSPECT THAT AT LEAST SOME GREEK SCHOOLS HAVE, AS SUGGESTED BY TURKISH EMBASSY (REF A), HAVE BEEN EXEMPTED FROM PROPERTY TAX. OTHERWISE, GREEK COMMUNITY WOULD HAVE BEEN HARD-PRESSED TO KEEP UP TAXES ON MANY OF THEIR EDUCATIONAL PROPERTIES. MANY ARE HIGHLY DESIREABLE

COMMERCIAL SITES WHICH ARE ALSO PRESUMEDLY IN HIGH TAX AREAS.

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ZAPION GIRLS SCHOOL, FOR INSTANCE, IS ONE OF FINEST BUILDINGS IN ISTANBUL AND IS LOCATED ONE BLOCK OFF TAKSIM SQUARE, COMMERCIAL AND TRANSPORTATION CENTER OF CITY.

6. CLARIFYING ONE POINT WHICH DID NOT SEEM CLEAR FROM INFORMATION PROVIDED BY TURKISH EMBASSY, CHURCHES IN ISTANBUL ARE EXEMPTED, AS WE UNDERSTAND IT, FROM PROPERTY TAX BUT THEY DO PAY TAX ON INCOME. WE ARE TOLD THAT THIS INCLUDES INCOME FROM PARISHIONERS' DONATIONS, BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY, ON RENTAL INCOME FROM CONSIDERABLE PROPERTIES OWNED BY CHURCHES OF VARIOUS DENOMINATIONS.

7. COMMENT: IN LONG-TERM, GIVEN PACE OF URBAN GROWTH IN ISTANBUL, AND COMPETITION FOR COMMERCIAL SPACE, WE EXPECT PRESSURES, INCLUDING INCREASED PROPERTY TAXES, WILL CONTINUE ON UNDER-UTILIZED PROPERTIES HELD BY GREEK COMMUNITY. FOR SHORT-TERM, HOWEVER, WE SHARE WITH PATRIARCHATE OPTIMISM THAT GIVEN SPECIAL HISTORICAL CIRCUMSTANCES OF GREEK COMMUNITY, PRESENT GOVERNMENT WILL WORK OUT ACCEPTABLE MODUS-VIVENDI. METROPOLITAN BARTHOLOMEW TOLD US THAT PATRIARCHATE WOULD BE SENDING REPRESENTATIVES TO ANKARA IN NEAR FUTURE TO DISCUSS OUTSTANDING ISSUES WITH PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER OF INTERIOR. REMOVAL FROM GOVERNMENT OF ANTI-MINORITY NATIONAL SALVATION PARTY AND NATIONAL ACTION PARTY HAVE OBVIOUSLY ENCOURAGED PATRIARCHATE TO HOPE THESE DISCUSSIONS WILL BE SUCCESSFUL.

8. AMONG ISSUES TO BE DISCUSSED IN ANKARA WILL BE TRAVEL FOR REMAINING THREE METROPOLITANS. CONGEN HAD HOPED FOR MORE PROGRESS ON THIS QUESTION AND WE NOTE THAT TURKISH EMBASSY APPARENTLY DID NOT ADDRESS SUBJECT IN INFORMATION IT PROVIDED DEPARTMENT. MISSING COMPONENT IN THIS ISSUE, SO FAR AS WE ARE CONCERNED, IS REASON TURKS CONTINUE TO DEFACTO DENY TRAVEL TO THESE PRELATES. METROPOLITAN BARTHOLOMEW PROFESSES TO NOT KNOW AND STATED THAT IT THERE WERE SERIOUS CHARGES BEHIND

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TRAVEL BAN THEN AUTHORITIES WOULD HAVE TAKEN HIM AND OTHERS TO COURT. WE ARE NOT SO SURE THIS WOULD BE CASE, SINCE TURKS ARE WELL AWARE OF PROBABLE INTERNATIONAL REACTION TO SUCH ACTION. NOW THAT METROPOLITAN MELITON, THE ONE GREEK ORTHODOX PRELATE OF WHOM TURKS SEEM MOST SUSPICIOUS, HAS GONE ABROAD, WE ARE REASONABLY CERTAIN THAT OTHERS WILL SOON FOLLOW. IF, HOWEVER, IT APPEARS THAT AFTER ECEVIT GOVERNMENT HAS EXAMINED ISSUE IT DECIDES TO CONTINUE DEFACTO RESTRICTIONS ON REMAINING

PRELATES' TRAVEL, BASED ON WHAT WE KNOW OF SUBJECT, WE WOULD
FIND IT VERY DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND OR JUSTIFY.
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